representing four regions of the country. The mandate of these programmes relate to major problems of priority crops, development of transgenics, quality improvement and basic research in the area of plant molecular biology. A network programme on use of molecular marker technology in wheat quality breeding and also for the improvement of sorghum, finger and pearl millet has been implemented. International collaborations have also been taken up.

The ICAR continued efforts to enhance farm profitability through crop improvement and mangement. Use of biotechnology and hybrid technology, in particular, has been promoted through specific projects on hybrid technology, development of trasngenics and genomics. Human resource development in biotechnology was undertaken by identifying scientists from ICAR institutes/SAUs for training abroad to provide cutting edge advantages in the field of agriculture. ICAR has continued to participate in international rice genome seuquencing project Phase-II. Besides the above, a network project on "Functional Genomics and Transgenics in Crops" including cereals, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, fruits and cash crops, seeks to strengthen the R&D efforts at a cost of about Rs. 32.85 crores. A network project on molecular breeding has also been sanctioned with an outlay of Rs. 2.41 crores.

**Upliftment of Scheduled Castes**

1462. SHRI MOTIUR RAHMAN: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is no clear cut strategy on the part of Government for the upliftment of Scheduled Caste (SC) population living below the poverty line;

(b) whether only 281 SC artisans were benefited under the National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) schemes during 1st April, 2001 to 1st March, 2004 and if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps taken to strengthen the monitoring of the NSFDC's schemes?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI SUBBULAKSHMI JAGADEESAN): (a) The thrust of the strategy is to eradicate poverty and empower weaker

sections of the society particularly SC/ST population. In almost all the schemes/programmes adequate coverage of the Scheduled Castes beneficiaries is ensured.

(b) The NSFDC has extended benefits to 2,12,121 Scheduled Caste beneficiaries in addition to the 281 Scheduled Castes artisans.

(c) NSFDC's monitoring mechanism has been strengthened by way of (i) submission of Quarterly Progress Reports and (ii) periodic Utilization Drives undertaken by NSFDC, and (iii) random inspections of beneficiary units by NSFDC Officials and independent agencies.

**Declaration of other backward classes**

1463. SHRI O.T. LEPCHA: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Chettri, Bhawan and Newar Castes have been declared as Other Backward Classes (OBC) by the State Government of Sikkim;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps being taken or proposed to be taken by Government to recognize these castes as OBCs in the State?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI SUBBULAKSHMI JAGADEESAN): (a) and (b) The Government of Sikkim vide Extra Ordinary Gazette Notification No. 308, dated 9th September, 2003 has declared the three Communities viz. (i) BAHUN, (ii) CHETTRI and (iii) NEWAR as Other Backward Classed for the State of Sikkim.

(c) Does not arise.

**Construction of night shelters**

1464. SHRI T.T. V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to build night shelters to accommodate homeless persons in every district;